**Why innovation projects fail**

Almost every European country is innovating its education system. The rise of the internet has lead to an increasing awareness that teachers are no longer the sole source of information. Children are increasingly searching the internet for information, using social networks for communication and games for learning purposes. How do educators react?

By Fred Verboon

By reviewing the projects that ESHA has contributed to, this article aims to set out some of the challenges of implementing educational innovation in school around Europe.

In my quest to find best practices, I have came across many interesting projects and programs, varying from 21st century skills, flipping classrooms, Khan academy to entrepreneurism and lifelong learning. The ESHA community portal at <http://eshacommunity.wikispaces.com/home> offers an overview of these interesting initiatives.

Most of these initiatives are proven best practices. However, from the perspective of schools, implementing these initiative is not something that is easily done. Desk research show that a substantial number of implementations fail to deliver the desired outcome.

In this article, two main challenges will be described:

* School are not ready to innovate
* Teachers and school heads are afraid of change.

**Schools are not ready to innovate.**

The main reason for innovating education is to improve education. Therefore, innovation of education is only useful if these innovations are focused on class room practices and improve the learning experience of learners. Teachers and learners should therefore be at the centre of successful innovations. Their commitment is essential for the success of every innovation project.

How do we increase the commitment of teachers? In many projects, we have experienced a strong correlation between the success of innovation projects the long term strategy of the schools.

We noticed that a well defined long term strategy is conditional to the success of innovation projects if the innovation supports the long term objectives of the school, outlined in the strategy. When innovations and long term strategies are aligned, teachers are more likely to perceive the innovation project as beneficial to both the school and the teachers.

In schools that do not have a well defined identity and long term strategy, the probability increases that the innovations were perceived by the teachers as disruptive to the daily practices. It seems valid to conclude that, from a school perspective, innovative projects should be aligned with the identity and strategy of a school.

**Identity**

In the corporate world, there are many well defined identities. Take KLM for example. The Royal Dutch Airlines has one word that described why customers should fly with KLM: reliable. KLM strives to be the most reliable airline in the world. If you fly KLM, you will arrive in time and there are no double bookings.

Schools can and should identify themselves. An example of a school with a strong identity is the Cosmicus College in Rotterdam. The web site of this rather small school can be found at: <http://www.cosmicuscollege.nl/> . Even though this site is entirely in Dutch, only by browsing their site should give one an idea of the school’s identity. Their central theme is “World Citizen”. The school educates their students to become successful world citizens, with the emphasis on cultures and languages. Even the logo of the school includes a globe.

Many successful innovative schools have clearly defined their identity and have drafted long term strategy plans. By including teachers, governors and community members in the strategic decision making their commitment to the strategic objective are likely to increases significantly.

**Long term plans and performance reviews**

The long term objectives in the school plan need to be incorporated in the yearly evaluation of teachers. Given a certain amount of freedom, each individual evaluation and performance review should contribute to the long term success of the school. This way, teachers feel that they are contributing to the long term success of the school and innovations will be regarded a valuable assets by both school leaders and teachers. .

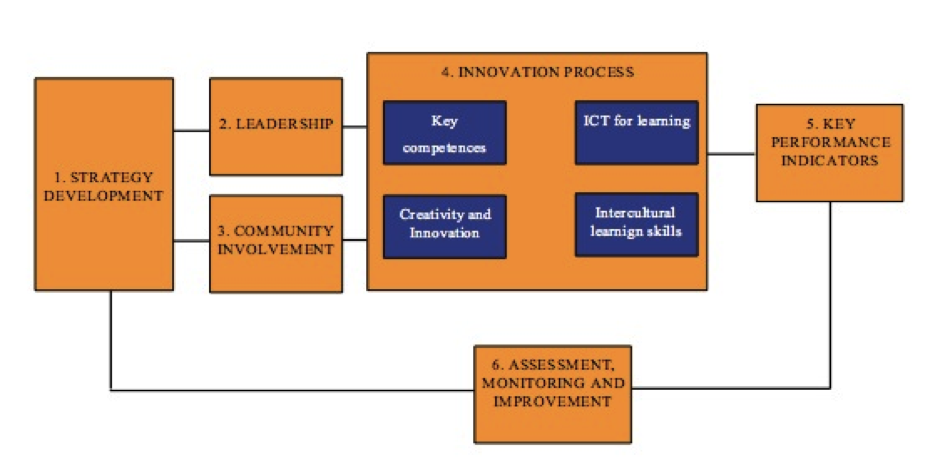
How do innovations fit in? In my opinion, a well defined strategic plan includes the long term objectives that the school would like to achieve. If a innovation program fits in the strategic plan and enables the school to achieve its long term objectives, the innovations will likely be regarded as a means to achieving the long term objectives. Without a strategic direction and long term plans, innovations are likely to be perceived as “ad hoc” or “not invented here”.

**Quality for Innovation**

The Quality for Innovation project (Q4I) offers valuable assets to increase the commitment of teachers and community members. The site of the Q4I project is located at: <http://q4i-schools.eu/>

The Q4I project combines quality assurance with innovation. The innovation of the model stands in the fact that it tackles at the same time all the needed areas where change is needed and all the processes that must be affected by change. This differentiates Q4I from many existing approaches, which focus on a single dimension of school without being able to have an impact at the level of the organisation.

Figure 1 clearly shows the dependency of the actual innovation processes with strategy development, leadership and community involvement.

[](http://files.q4i-schools.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Q4I-model.png)

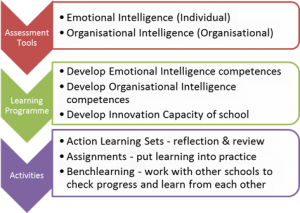
ESHA has published a questionnaire that enables schools to measure their readiness for innovation. The questionnaire can be found at: <http://eshacommunity.wikispaces.com/Quality+of+Education> . This questionnaire is the starting point for the Q4I project.

**Resistance to change**

The second dominant factor I have researched is “Resistance to change”. Resistance is common to all humans. Nobody really likes change and uncertainty. However, the way the people deal with change varies extensively. Some embrace change as a means to keep on learning and developing themselves. Others dislike change, feel overburdened by their daily tasks and strive toward self preservation.

In schools, a relative high percentage of teachers feel overburdened by their daily tasks. For these teachers, resistance to change is the expected behaviour in innovation programs. I found that resistance to change is one of the major reasons why innovation programs fail in both the corporate world and education.

The Iguana project (<http://www.iguana-project.eu/> ) has published a learning program that enables schools to assess both the emotional and organisational intelligence of the staff members and the school as an organisation.

The second part of the learning program is a repository of useful courses aimed at developing the emotional intelligence at personal level and the organisational intelligence at school level. Developing both areas will lead to an increased innovation capacity. [](http://www.iguana-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/clip_image002.png)

In this project, the project partners acknowledge that the ability to innovate has a personal and organisational dimension. The organisational dimension deals with aspects like: are the people within the organisation encouraged to experiment. Can the school be characterized as a learning organisation with an open dialogue? Are teachers inspired and not judged? Is success considered as valuable as failures? Do teachers and other staff members feel safe?

**Concluding**

New approaches to teaching and learning need to be fostered to respond to the changing context with which education interacts. In response to these dynamics, school leaders need to take ownership and implement new approaches to teaching and learning.

There is evidently a wide variety of innovative teaching and learning practices across the education sectors. This said, the education system hasn’t yet managed to find the route to supporting the implementation of these practices. The Iguana and Q4I projects address two main barriers to innovation: organisational readiness and resistance to change.

**The author**

Fred Verboon is a former entrepreneur and now focuses on education. His passion is to contribute to successful schools. Fred lives in Katwijk, is married and has two daughters of ten and twelve years old

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